

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, Left Tehran for St. Petersburg, Russia, to Take Part in the 14th Meeting of BRICS High-Ranking Officials Responsible for Security Matters/National Security Advisors

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Interior Minister Announced That Border Control and Blocking Are Like the Four Walls of a House, Which Gives People a Sense of Security and Peace and Prevents Many Insecurities and Threats

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Final Negotiations for Synchronizing Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia Power Grids Begin



TEHRAN - CEO of Tavanir Company Mr. Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi discussed the electricity consumption trend this summer, stating that up to now, for 47 days, the country's electricity demand has exceeded last year's record, reaching close to 80,000 MW (79,872 MW).

He added that last summer, the last recorded demand reached 73,463 MW, reflecting an 8.7% increase.

The CEO of Tavanir Company further clarified the status of electricity exports and imports, explaining that they are based on agreements with neighboring countries, prioritizing domestic electricity supply. Electricity exports occur when there is surplus production, while imports are carried out, especially during peak summer demand.

He said that in addition to exporting electricity, there is also energy exchange or electricity transit, ensuring the stability of the domestic grid and supply throughout the year.

Rajabi Mashhadi noted that connecting Iran's power grid with Russia is being pursued through two routes: one via Azerbaijan and the other via Armenia-Georgia.

He continued, saying that feasibility studies for both routes have been completed. The study for synchronizing Iran's power grid with Russia through Azerbaijan's network has been finalized, and initial synchronization with a capacity of 300 MW is possible without the need for network reinforcement investments.

The CEO emphasized that final negotiations are underway to launch the implementation phase of synchronizing the power grids of Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia, with hopes of operationalizing this in the near future.

He also mentioned that connecting to Russia's power grid through Armenia and Georgia is still on the agenda.

Rajabi Mashhadi refuted claims about the blocking of payments for electricity exported to Pakistan, stating that such reports are completely false.

Hamas Calls on Int'l Community to Stop Nazi Regime's Holocaust



GAZA (Dispatches) - The Palestinian Hamas resistance movement has strongly denounced an Israeli attack on displaced people sheltering in tents in the al-Mawasi area of Khan Yunis in the south of Gaza Strip as "a brutal act of genocide."

"The occupying regime's appalling massacre against displaced people in the al-Mawasi area of Khan Yunis is a brutal act of genocide... This vicious targeting of unarmed civilians — women, children, and the elderly — in an area previously declared safe by the occupation army is proof of the ongoing Nazi policies that the Zionist entity is pursuing in its genocidal war against Palestinians," the Gaza-based group said in a statement on Tuesday morning.

It added that such mass killings are being deliberately carried out in complete disregard of the international law, humanitarian law, and UN resolutions calling for an end to the aggression, noting the massacres are being perpetrated with the full support of the US administration, which is complicit in Israeli brutalities against Palestinians.

It also dismissed Israeli army's allegations concerning the presence of resistance fighters in the targeted area as "downright lies meant to justify such ugly crimes."

"The resistance front has repeatedly confirmed the absence of ... its members among civilian communities or the use of residential areas for military purposes," the statement pointed out.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Iran's Economy Grows by 4.2% in This Spring

TEHRAN - The Governor of the Central Bank of Iran stated that under the new law, the status of Islamic banking has been elevated. He also announced a 4.2% growth in Iran's economy this spring, emphasizing that the primary responsibility of the Central Bank is to control inflation and preserve the value of the national currency.

Mohammad Reza Farzin, at the 34th Islamic Banking Conference, said that the term "Islamic banking" is now included in the new Central Bank law, expressing hope that the law would be implemented effectively.

Farzin added that the economy faced various shocks, particularly political and security-related, but under the guidance of the Supreme Leader and national unity, stability was maintained, allowing key economic indicators to follow a stable path.

He mentioned that the industrial, mining, and service sectors witnessed a decline in growth. In the first quarter of this year, the overall industry index grew by 3.5%, with some industries showing good performance, while others lagged, particularly the automotive sector.

Regarding economic growth, Farzin noted that the preliminary estimates for the first quarter of this year showed a 4.2% growth in GDP, slightly lower than last year. The GDP growth was primarily driven by agriculture, which grew by 3.4%, and the oil sector, which also saw significant growth.

Customs data showed that exports in the first five months of this year reached \$21.9 billion, while imports were \$26.3 billion, marking a 5.5% increase. Farzin said that if this trend continues, Iran's economy could achieve a 3.7% growth by the end of the year. However, he noted that this growth rate is unsatisfactory, and new measures are needed to stimulate economic growth.

Farzin expressed concern about industrial growth and emphasized that two key issues—the budgetary imbalance and the banking sector—require attention in government policies.

He highlighted the importance of sustainable financing for economic growth, stating that relying solely on the banking system for financing would hinder efforts to control inflation

and liquidity.

He noted that the growth rate of money supply influences inflation expectations, and the 23% growth rate indicates that inflation expectations are being controlled. He also mentioned that liquidity growth was targeted at around 23%, but as of August, it had reached 27.5%.

Farzin stressed the need to focus on stabilizing the foreign exchange market to control inflation, stating that the Central Bank's main goal is to curb inflation. Inflation had already shown significant improvement this year, with the producer price index (PPI) falling to 28.2% from 34.5% the previous year.

He also highlighted the need for reform in the banking sector, mentioning that eight banks were given corrective programs last year, although some banks have been slow to implement changes.

Farzin emphasized that banks should reduce their imbalances and increase their capital while moving away from owning business enterprises. Additionally, mandated loans, such as marriage loans, play a role in expanding financial inclusion in the banking system.

Regarding marriage and childbirth loans, Farzin mentioned that while the law requires banks to allocate \$200 trillion IRR, only \$75 trillion IRR has been provided so far, and significantly more resources are needed. He indicated that new policies would soon be introduced to address this issue.

Farzin said that the new Central Bank law, implemented in August, has strengths and weaknesses, and discussions are ongoing with the Economic Commission to address challenges.

Finally, he noted that cryptocurrencies pose challenges to financial systems worldwide. While the Central Bank has prepared a preliminary study on the matter, comprehensive policymaking involving other ministries is required. Cryptocurrencies, while potentially aiding in managing sanctions, also present risks.

President Calls for Identifying Roots Emigration From Country

TEHRAN - Addressing the intelligence forces, President Masoud Pezeshkian said: "The result of your efforts must be the preservation of the country's material and spiritual assets and human resources. We must not be indifferent to the emigration of the country's elites and material wealth, and we must identify its roots."

Pezeshkian, in a meeting this morning with the managers and employees of the Ministry of Intelligence on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of its establishment, stated that the first step toward the development and reconstruction of the country is to eliminate unnecessary disputes and conflicts. He added: "If we had followed the tasks outlined in the vision document, the current state of the country would have been different."

He emphasized that we must fully believe that we want to and can be the best in the region, adding: "We were supposed to reach the top regional position based on the vision document, but today we must ask ourselves if the path we are on will lead us to this goal."

The President noted that if we clearly understand the goal, we will find the ways to reach it, and said: "We should not be seeking to place people close to us in various positions, but rather seek to have the most capable individuals implement the tasks outlined in the vision document, policies, and program laws. If someone is placed in a position they cannot handle, is their presence a service to the country or a betrayal?"

Pezeshkian pointed out that if the result of our presence in a position leads to satisfaction among the people, the Revolution, the Guardianship, and the Islamic Republic will be strengthened. He added: "Public satisfaction is a product of unity and harmony, not conflict and discord. People's satisfaction can be won with selfless and sincere service, not through commands and unnecessary strictness. If we are facing various social, cultural, and economic problems in the country today, their

roots lie in our management behavior, which has not been in line with the traditions of God and His messengers."

He further stated: "The problem for the people is our actions and behavior. If we can show through our actions which path our Imams followed, the faith and belief of the people will be strengthened. But if we engage in corruption and favoritism, no matter how good our words are, people will see our actions and won't pay attention to what we say. If we do not act properly, no matter how many hadiths or verses we recite, it will be in vain, and by creating a perception of hypocrisy among the people, we will only damage their beliefs further."

The President described the employees and managers of the Ministry of Intelligence as the true, unsung, and modest soldiers and noted: "Your role in ensuring and enhancing the country's security is unparalleled, and thus the outcome of your efforts must be the preservation of the nation's material and spiritual assets and human resources. We must not be indifferent to the emigration of the country's elites and material wealth, and we must identify and eliminate its root causes."

In another part of his speech, Pezeshkian emphasized that we cannot expect elites to present themselves to us; rather, we must seek them out and attract them. He said: "To implement the tasks outlined in the vision document, we need the help of elites, but we must bear in mind that attracting these individuals cannot be done through orders. We must respectfully request their help."

He stressed that while it may be easy to remove individuals from the train of the Revolution, bringing them on board and keeping them engaged is by no means an easy task, so we must ensure that our actions do not unjustly cause anyone to be removed from the train of the Revolution."

Iran Not Afraid of Confrontation With Any Power



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Iranian Navy says the country has reached a point of unprecedented strength that has rendered it capable of handling whatever type of confrontation.

"Today, our strength and esteem in the [country's] Islamic establishment is not comparable to any other period," Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said during a visit to a training center belonging to the Iranian Army's Ground Forces in Tehran Province on Monday.

"Backed by the Armed Forces, the Islamic Republic's sacred establishment is [now] unafraid of confrontation with any regional and extra-regional force or power in the Persian Gulf," he added.

The commander asserted that ever since the victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution, the forces have staged effective and punctual presence at all required junctures.

The navy, whose area of operation used to be confined to the Persian Gulf during the years that followed the Revolution's victory, has now managed to achieve "remarkable successes" to the point that it has now established a presence across the international waters, he noted.

He cited the country's having established an "effective" presence across the Indian Ocean, where it provides security for the combat naval body of water's littoral states.

Irani also mentioned that the combat naval group that has been assigned by the country to the Gulf of Aden had managed to complete all of its navigation operations in the littoral area safely and without accident so far.

"This is while countries like the United States have failed to evade the strikes that are carried out by the [regional] resistance groups [against their ships there] and thus ensure the security of their fleet, despite their operating a hundred of advanced vessels [in the area]," he said.

Visiting another training center in northern Iran, Irani asserted that the country's enemies were updating their military equipment every day.

He, accordingly, advised the Islamic Republic's Armed Forces too stay ahead of the time by constantly modernizing their training procedures and relying on the world's state-of-the-art technology to be able to foil the enemies' plots.

The country has been depending on domestic endeavor and know-how to make significant advances in the direction of enhancing the forces' self-sufficiency.

Iranian Court Holds New Trial Session for MKO Terrorists in Tehran



TEHRAN (IP) - The new round of court hearings on the charges against 104 members of the People's Mojahedin Khalgh Organization, known as MKO, began on Tuesday.

104 members of the MKO terrorist outfit will be tried in the Tehran courthouse, and this court has asked the fugitive members of this group to present their lawyers to this court.

The new round was held at the 11th branch of the criminal court of Tehran province on Tuesday in a case that tries 104 natural persons as well as one legal entity in absentia.

Judge Dehqani, who presided over the session, said judicial notices have already been sent out to all defendants of the case under the Islamic penal code of Iran, stressing that the defendants have neither hired a lawyer nor filed a defense with the court.

Judge Dehqani added: "The inherent duty of the United Nations and its Secretary General is to deal with the perpetrators of criminal acts and to accompany the pioneering governments in the fight against terrorism."

He addressed the Secretary General of the United Nations, stating: "Today in Tehran, an indictment was sent to one of our criminal branches, and 104 accused of terrorist charges, which are considered terrorist acts according to all laws, are considered crimes against humanity, are being investigated, crimes such as hijacking planes, burning children, killing women."

Judge Dehqani emphasized: "The people of Iran expect that the United Nations, the Secretary-General, its affiliated members, and its reporters will not be accused of such acts. They also hope that the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations Secretary-General will cooperate with nations and governments that are victims of terrorism to achieve world peace and strive for the fair trial of the accused."

Dehqani said: "The Iranian nation is one of the biggest victims of terrorism in the world, and what was brought to this court by the Tehran Prosecutor's Office is about the accusations, one of which requires separate rules and legal procedures for the accused terrorists."

Within two years, from 1979 to 1981, elements of this terrorist outfit assassinated many officials, revolutionary forces, and ordinary people and claimed responsibility for all these assassinations.

IRAN NEWS



Foreign Minister Appoints His New Advisors

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi issued several orders on Monday to make an overhaul at his ministry by naming his new deputy and advisors.

Araqchi, in a decree, appointed Ali Abolhassani Shahrezat as one of his advisors and the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Abolhassani previously served as the Director of the Political Department of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation as well as Iran's ambassador to Belgrade. In yet another order, the Foreign Minister appointed Mohammad Sadegh Fazli to the position of his advisor.

Fazli had previously worked as Assistant Foreign Minister of Iran and General Director of the West Asia and North Africa Department of the Foreign Ministry. Meanwhile Majid Takht Ravanchi was appointed as political deputy. Takht Ravanchi has held positions such as Deputy Director of International Assemblies

PTA Between Iran and Afghanistan Being Drafted



TEHRAN - The president of the Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture of Khorramabad said that the preferential trade agreement between Iran and Afghanistan is currently under negotiation and drafting, and it is hoped that it will be finalized soon and tariffs will be clarified for economic actors.

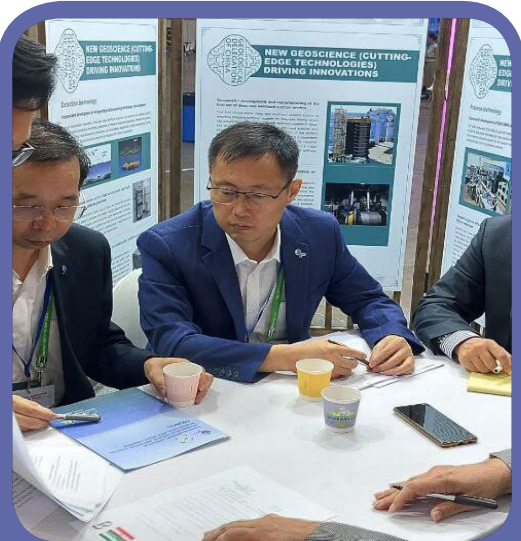
In a webinar meeting between economic activists of Lorestan and Afghanistan, Mohammad Khaki added that holding various meetings and recognizing each other's capacities is essential for expanding trade and economic relations. In the next step, the groundwork for further cooperation will be prepared.

He continued: "We hope to achieve good results with the Chabahar agreement, the favorable capacities of the official and land borders, and the definition of the government's priority for economic cooperation with neighboring countries, especially Afghanistan."

The president of the Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture of Khorramabad pointed out that the key to success is following up on systemic issues. He added: "We should not just rely on holding such meetings. Facilitating trade relations requires the cooperation of the Chamber of Commerce, embassies, the governorate, and joint chambers."

Khaki emphasized that encouraging economic activists to engage in trade will lead to an increase in the volume of exchanges and joint investments. He mentioned that areas of cooperation between Lorestan and Afghanistan could be categorized in fields such as human and veterinary medicines, food and agricultural industries, petrochemical and mineral products, stone, and building materials, as well as in the transfer of technology.

He also noted that developing relations with local chambers of Afghanistan, dispatching and receiving trade and investment delegations, holding bilateral business meetings, increasing traders' awareness of each other's facilities, identifying existing trade barriers in the province, offering solutions to facilitate trade, and enabling the participation of Lorestan and Afghan economic activists in international exhibitions are among the Chamber's plans to enhance relations with this neighboring country.



Iran, China Sign Cooperation Agreement

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A joint cooperation agreement between the Geological Organizations of Iran and China was signed on the sidelines of the 37th International Geological Congress in Busan, South Korea.

According to IRNA, from the Geological Survey of Iran (GSI), during the 37th International Geological Congress (IGC) in Busan, South Korea, a memorandum of understanding for geological cooperation that had previously been negotiated between the Geological Survey of Iran (GSI) and the China Geological Survey (CGS) was signed on August 28, 2024, at the China Geological Survey's booth by the heads of both organizations.

This memorandum of understanding, signed by "Alireza Shahidi," Iran's Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade and Head of the Geological Survey of Iran, and Mr. "Li Jinfa," President of the China Geological Survey (CGS), covers joint geological and exploration studies, green development in mineral resources, education and exchange of scientific and technical information, the creation and sharing of geoscience databases, and the joint organization of meetings, workshops, and seminars, among other activities.



Iran's Geopolitical Position in Energy Transit in the Middle East

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In a meeting with the Secretary-General of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), the Iranian Oil Minister referred to the global geopolitical situation and the unique conditions of gas markets, particularly during global energy crises.

He stated that due to its geopolitical position, Iran could serve as a suitable corridor and crossroads for energy exchanges and transit in the region, playing a pivotal role.

Mohsen Paknejad emphasized during today's (Monday, September 9) meeting with Mohamed Hamel, the Secretary-General of GECF, that Iran is one of the main founding members of this forum. He expressed optimism that hosting the 26th Ministerial Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum in November will bring about positive results for all member countries.

Paknejad added that just as the first ministerial meeting of the forum was held in Tehran in 2001 with beneficial outcomes for the members, it is expected that this upcoming meeting will also result in significant achievements with maximum participation.

The Oil Minister continued: Given the current geopolitical situation and the unique conditions of global gas markets, especially in light of global energy crises, special support for the GECF Secretariat is necessary. This support will enable the forum to play a critical role in stabilizing global energy security through the cooperation and participation of all its members.

Paknejad highlighted that the GECF's expert reports, such as its Gas Market Outlook, play a key role in this regard. He reiterated that Iran, with its geopolitical position, can be an ideal hub and transit point for energy exchanges in the region.

He further noted that gas plays an important role not only in energy security but also in advancing global climate policies, especially during the

transition to clean energy. In this regard, the GECF Secretariat, in coordination with the OPEC Secretariat, can play an effective role in the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29), which will be held in Azerbaijan.

The Oil Minister thanked the GECF Secretariat for its efforts in recent years, mentioning initiatives like the establishment of the Gas Research Institute (GRI), which could serve as a strong platform for member countries to cooperate in technology, training, and human resources.

Paknejad expressed hope that collaboration between the GECF Secretariat and the Petroleum Industry Research Institute will continue to develop, particularly in emerging areas like hydrogen and artificial intelligence.

He expressed optimism that the 26th GECF Ministerial Meeting would be held with maximum participation from member and observer countries, marking another milestone in the history of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum.

The Oil Minister added that the Secretary-General's role in coordinating this meeting is noteworthy and, given his experience and expertise, the task will be carried out effectively.

Paknejad emphasized that the Iranian Ministry of Oil has made significant efforts to ensure the effective organization of this meeting. Due to time constraints at the start of the 14th administration, Tehran was selected as the meeting venue, and new invitations will soon be sent out.

He concluded by noting that a strong working group, led by the Ministry's International Affairs and Commerce Deputy, has been formed, and he called on the GECF Secretariat to cooperate with the organizing team to ensure the event is a success.

The 26th GECF Ministerial Meeting will be held from October 27 to 29, 2024, in Tehran.

Semnan Private Sector Ready to Cooperate with China in the Development of Solar Power Plants

TEHRAN - The President of Semnan Chamber of Commerce, referring to China's role in the use of clean industries and the development of renewable energy, and considering the potential

for expanding solar energy in Semnan province, stated: "Semnan province has a special capacity for the construction and development of large- and small-scale solar power plants and is ready to welcome Chinese investors to invest in various sectors of the province, especially in the development of modern solar power plants with up-to-date technology."

Farajollah Memari, in a meeting with economic activists from Semnan and the Chinese ambassador in Tehran, added: "Economic actors in Semnan province are open to the transfer of technical knowledge in creating renewable power plants and are interested in high-efficiency solar energy technology and energy storage systems."

A member of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce remarked: "The Silk Road, as one of the most important historical trade routes, played a crucial role in the exchange of goods, cultures, sciences, and religions among different civilizations."

He added: "The Silk Road played a key role in the exchange of ideas and cultures, and the sharing of religions and scientific knowledge, such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy, between various civilizations."

Memari noted that in today's modern world, the Silk Road has once again gained attention as a symbol of international cooperation and connection. In recent years, China has initiated the 'Belt and Road' project to revive trade and economic ties between Asia, Europe, and Africa through land and sea routes, similar to the Silk Road.

He further explained that China, through its Belt and Road initiative, is seeking to develop infrastructure, expand economic cooperation, and establish trade networks across Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The President of Semnan Chamber of Commerce highlighted infrastructure and transportation projects, energy and natural

resources, development of special economic zones and free trade areas, technology and innovation, research and development, digital projects, information technology, agriculture, and food

industries, financial and banking projects, tourism development, and the hospitality industry as important areas that should be focused on by both sides.

Memari described the Belt and Road initiative as one of the largest economic projects globally, saying: "This project has created extensive opportunities for private sector actors in various fields, ranging from transportation and energy infrastructure development to investment in information technology and tourism."

He added: "This project allows economic actors to invest in different regions and benefit from new opportunities, thereby playing a role in global economic growth and development."

During the visit of the Chinese ambassador to Iran, Memari pointed out that Semnan province has 3,000 active industrial and mining units and possesses 40 types of minerals out of the 71 found in the country. He emphasized that the province ranks first in the country in terms of social, cultural, and economic indicators due to its hardworking and industrious people.

He listed salt, coal, copper, Celestine, and sodium sulfate as the main minerals in the province, stating that Semnan is the top producer of gypsum in the country.

In the meeting, several economic actors from Semnan discussed their challenges in exporting goods and materials, as well as issues with machinery supply, asking the Chinese ambassador to resume the import of machinery that had been restricted due to sanctions.

The Chinese ambassador in Tehran, while expressing gratitude to the Semnan Chamber of Commerce for their readiness to cooperate, stated: "Many of the issues raised by the producers in Semnan province are due to sanctions, and China has the capacity to cooperate with Iran."

Trade Exchanges Between Iran and Oman Should Exceed \$2b



TEHRAN - The head of the Khorramshahr Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture said that, upon the invitation of the Khorramshahr Chamber, an Omani economic delegation consisting of two deputy ministers, the president and vice president of the Chamber of Commerce of the northeastern province of the Sultanate of Oman, along with a group of businessmen and investors from that country, arrived in Khorramshahr. On the first day, they visited Khorramshahr's industrial town and some industrial units in the region.

Seyed Mostafa Mousavi added that a face-to-face meeting between this trade delegation and Khorramshahr's economic activists, along with managers from the Arvand Free Zone Organization, was another part of the delegation's agenda. Particularly, the Arvand Free Zone, due to its diverse economic potentials and advantages such as 20-year tax exemptions and various incentives for land allocation and obtaining permits, is considered an ideal destination for attracting international investments.

He mentioned the increase in joint investments with Omani counterparts in recent years, saying that there are many advantages for joint investments among economic actors, and the path for such cooperation has been established. However, it is necessary to stabilize a secure environment to develop these investments.

The head of Khorramshahr's chamber further stated that the key areas for joint investment development in Arvand include industries such as petrochemicals and related sectors, steel industries, packaging of dates and dried fruits, agricultural products, medical industries, healthcare centers, transit investments, and energy sectors.

Mousavi emphasized Iran's openness to accepting joint investments and the readiness of the Arvand Free Zone Organization for this purpose. He also noted that Omani representatives, during the meeting, pointed to the presence of 14 free and special economic zones in Oman and expressed their interest in expanding economic cooperation and activities between the two sides.

Referring to the level of economic cooperation between the two countries, he stated: "Currently, around 2 billion dollars in economic collaboration exists between Iran and Oman. Given the promising markets and both sides' desire to develop relations, there is potential to multiply this cooperation. Achieving this requires the development of economic diplomacy and improvement of marketing and economic participation."

Political Changes in Russia a Transit Opportunity for Iran



TEHRAN - Jabbar Ali Zakeri, the CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, during the farewell and inauguration ceremony for the new CEO of the railway company, held Monday, in the presence of the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, expressed his gratitude to the Minister and the Cabinet for their trust. He said, "I hope we can take steps towards the goals set in the railway sector."

He explained that railway management worldwide is moving toward reducing government involvement in the rail sector.

Zakeri stated that the railway previously had about 42,000 employees, but over time, with the aim of reducing government management and decentralizing staff, many of these employees have been transferred to various sectors and other companies.

Referring to different railway management models in other countries, Zakeri mentioned that some countries have fully privatized their railway sector, while others outsource specific tasks.

He noted, "Our country stands somewhere in between, and we certainly need serious decisions at higher levels and in policy documents to achieve reduced government control over the railway."

Zakeri continued, "Investment in the railway is another issue that cannot be realized by relying solely on government revenues. The use of the private sector's capacity for railway investment must be taken more seriously."

North Korea to Increase Number of Nuclear Weapons

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the country is now implementing a nuclear force construction policy to increase the number of nuclear weapons "exponentially," state media KCNA said on Tuesday.

In a speech on North Korea's founding anniversary on Monday, Kim said the country must more thoroughly prepare its "nuclear capability and its readiness to use it properly at any given time in ensuring the security rights of the state", said KCNA.

A strong military presence is needed to face "the various threats posed by the United States and its followers," he added. Kim also said North Korea is facing a "grave threat" from what it said was a U.S.-led nuclear-based military bloc in the region. South Korea will hold a defence ministerial meeting with the member states of the United Nations Command (UNC) on Tuesday. The UNC is led by the commander of the U.S. military stationed in South Korea.



Ukraine's Drones Target Moscow, More Than 30 Airline Flights Suspended



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian officials said on Tuesday they shot down at least 15 drones around Moscow overnight in a wave of attacks that set residential buildings on fire, killed a woman and forced more than 30 flights in the capital to be suspended.

More than 60 drones were also downed over Russia's southwestern region of Bryansk, which borders Ukraine and the Lipetsk region in Russia's south, regional governors said. There was no damage or casualties reported there.

Ukraine's domestic drone industry has been growing rapidly and Kyiv has been stepping up drone attacks on Russian energy, military and transport infrastructure.

Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanin said on the Telegram messaging app that at least 15 drones were downed around Moscow, with emergency crews dispatched to several sites across the region and near the Zhukovo airport and to the Domodedovo district - home to one of the Moscow's largest airports.

Russia's RIA agency reported that both the Domodedovo and Zhukovo airports were closed for air traffic following the suspension of more than 30 domestic and international flights there and at other airports that serve the Russian capital.

The overnight drone attacks damaged at least two high-rise apartment buildings in the Ramenskoye district of the Moscow region, setting several flats on fire, Moscow's governor Andrei Vorobyov said on Telegram.

A 46-year-old woman died and three people were injured in Ramenskoye, Vorobyov said. He added that 43 people were evacuated to temporary accommodation centres.

Algeria Candidates Question Result of Presidential Vote

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - The two unsuccessful candidates in Algeria's presidential election contested on Monday the turnout and percentage of votes they won in the weekend ballot, denouncing a "fraud".

Speaking to reporters in the capital Algiers, Islamist candidate Abdelali Hassani nonetheless conceded to incumbent President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who won with a landslide of nearly 95 percent of the vote on Saturday, according to the country's electoral authority, ANIE.

Hassani, who heads the moderate Islamist party the Movement of Society for Peace, said he had "lost the battle but not the war".

He was one of only two challengers to Tebboune, the second being Youcef Aouchiche of the centre-left Socialist Forces Front (FFS).

At a press conference, Aouchiche said "the country finds itself in a very uncomfortable, even dangerous situation".

"ANIE bears full responsibility for these dangerous deviations that undermine the election," he said, vowing an appeal against the preliminary figures to the Constitutional Court.

The court is expected to review all appeals and validate the final results.

The other challenger, Hassani, had earlier denounced "false figures" on voter turnout and demanded that authorities put a stop to the "masquerade".

He also disputed the percentage of the vote he was declared to have won, which was only 3.17 percent according to ANIE's figures, which gave Aouchiche 2.15 percent.

Tebboune, 78, was widely expected to breeze through the election and was focused instead on securing a high turnout.

Kazakhstan Sets Strategic Directions for Progress



By: F. Taherpoor

TEHRAN - Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Tehran H.E. Ontalap Onalbayev on Monday in a press conference elaborated the recent state-of-the-nation speech of Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Mr. Onalbayev said that Kazakhstan President Tokayev on September 2 and at the joint meeting of the houses of the parliament outlined nine strategic directions in his annual state-of-the-nation address titled 'Just Kazakhstan: Law and Order, Economic Growth, Public Optimism.'

Tokayev pointed to 9 major points in his speech and instructed the elimination of imbalances between monetary and fiscal policies, the enhancement of the investment climate and business conditions, the systematic development of the country's industrial potential, and the prioritization of infrastructure issues. It is also essential to increase the human resources potential, implement comprehensive measures to strengthen the nation's health and reboot the system of social support for citizens, enhance the environment and promote sustainability and increase efficiency in public administration, Onalbayev said, adding that one of the major points was to establish an ideological approach to maintaining law and order in society.

The Ambassador then touched upon the details of each point that President Tokayev had mentioned in his address.

Budget pragmatism was one of the key messages, the president mentioned for the point number 1 and said: "Economic growth should be accompanied by reduced inequality and a strengthened middle class. This is the only way we can enhance our state's potential. To achieve this, efficiency must be the key criterion. Every decision and project must be evaluated based on their benefit to the state," the Ambassador quoted.

Investment climate and business conditions was the other point as the President's words emphasized the importance of decisive action to attract capital amidst intense global competition, Onalbayev added.

"Key initiatives to boost the investment climate include creating favorable conditions to increase business activity by attracting private investment into the economy and offering incentives for investors focused on developing production. Additionally, benefits should be provided for exporters of high-value-added products. The President also instructed the strengthening of the Investment Headquarters operations and the adjustment of the government's activities to involve local executive bodies and ministers in attracting investors, the ambassador noted.

Development of the country's industrial potential was the other issue as the government approved a list of 17 significant projects, prioritizing high-value-added areas, the ambassador said, quoting the President as saying: "it is necessary to use domestic raw materials and components and establish related production around giant companies. Effective incentives, including the provision of appropriate tariffs and wholesale prices, need to be implemented to ensure a return on investment."

Solution for urgent infrastructure problems was another topic in the speech as President Tokayev highlighted the urgent infrastructure problems in the energy sector and public utilities.

"Standard terms of lending for the construction of new generation facilities are not acceptable. The government must consider how to ensure affordable long-term lending from financial institutions," Tokayev said in his speech.

Tokayev identified nuclear energy as a reliable and environmentally friendly solution to the country's growing energy needs.

He also addressed the challenges posed by water management and emphasized the urgent need to focus on irrigation systems and the water sector.

Boosting the nation's workforce was another issue as Tokayev addressed the country's



human resources potential. "Providing the economy with qualified personnel is the most urgent task. First of all, it is necessary to overcome the shortage of industry specialists: water workers, builders, power engineers and many other experts. It is also crucial to train specialists in the professions of the future. Work in this direction has already begun," he said.

The list of measures includes strengthening the connection between the best universities and the real sector of the economy and transferring all government agencies to a single personnel information system. To promote the value of hard work and professionalism, 2025 has been declared the Year of Working Professions.

Strengthening the health of the nation and rebooting the system of social support for citizens was the other issue as the President said: "It is necessary to implement comprehensive measures to strengthen the health of the nation and reboot the system of social support for citizens. State support should be focused on citizens who really need it. Social assistance should be provided on the principles of fairness, openness and efficiency."

The President highlighted issues within the healthcare system, including the need for a unified state medical information system and shortage of qualified medical personnel.

The President then highlighted the other issue in his speech which was environmental issues and promoting a caring attitude toward the environment.

Tokayev emphasized the need to continue the widespread introduction of the most advanced technologies in this area and to establish a modern emission monitoring system.

The preservation of Kazakhstan's unique flora and fauna will also remain a key focus. The state will take all necessary measures to protect forests and steppes from fires.

Taza Kazakhstan, the nationwide environmental campaign, united people this year. In just a few months, about 3 million people participated in the campaign, collecting more than one million tons of garbage.

Efficiency in public administration was the other issue highlighted in his speech as Tokayev noted that five years have passed since the launch of the "listening state" concept. During this period, the interaction between society and government agencies has changed. Effective mechanisms for expressing opinions and various dialogue platforms have been established. Now, it is essential to create a unified ecosystem for handling appeals and accurately determining citizens' needs and expectations.

Maintaining law and order in society was the last topic of his speech as the President noted that there is no place for oppression in Kazakh society, whether on linguistic, religious, ethnic or social grounds.

"Law and order must reign in our society. This is a fundamental condition for ensuring both public and individual security. Only by adhering to this principle can we build a Just, Clean, and Safe Kazakhstan," he said.

Tokayev also emphasized the need for a peaceful and balanced foreign policy, stressing that diplomacy is essential in strengthening Kazakhstan's sovereignty, protecting the rights of its citizens abroad, promoting national interests and attracting investment. Kazakhstan continues to demonstrate its dedication to multilateral cooperation in accordance with the UN Charter.

The ambassador also said that Tokayev announced a national referendum on October 6 to determine the future of nuclear energy in the country. This decision follows a year of discussions and debates on whether Kazakhstan should build a nuclear power plant (NPP) to meet its growing energy demands.

Germany Tightens Controls at All Borders in Immigration Crackdown

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's government announced plans to impose tighter controls at all of the country's land borders in what it called an attempt to tackle irregular migration and protect the public from threats such as Islamist extremism.

The controls within what is normally a wide area of free movement - the European Schengen zone - will start on Sept. 16 and initially last for six months, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said on Monday.

The government has also designed a scheme enabling authorities to reject more migrants directly at German borders, Faeser said, without adding details on the controversial and legally fraught move.

The restrictions are part of a series of measures Germany has taken to toughen its stance on irregular migration in recent years following a surge in arrivals, in particular people fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government is seeking to seize back the initiative from the opposition far-right and conservatives, who have seen support rise as they tap into voter worries about stretched public services, integration and security.

"We are strengthening internal security and continuing our hard line against irregular migration," Faeser said, noting the government had notified the European Commission

and neighboring countries of the intended controls.

Recent deadly knife attacks in which the suspects were asylum seekers have stoked concerns over immigration. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a knife attack in the western city of Solingen that killed three people in August.

The AfD earlier this month became the first far-right party since World War Two to win a state election, in Thuringia, after campaigning heavily on the issue of migration.

Polls show it is also voters' top concern in the state of Brandenburg, which is set to hold elections in two weeks.

Scholz and Faeser's centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) are fighting to retain control of the government there, in a vote billed as a test of strength of the SPD ahead of next year's federal election.

"The intention of the government seems to be to show symbolically to Germans and potential migrants that the latter are no longer wanted here," said Marcus Engler at the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research.

A backlash had been building in Germany ever since it took in more than a million people mostly fleeing war-torn countries such as Syria during the 2015/2016 migrant crisis, migration experts say.

It reached a tipping point in the country of 84 million people after it automatically granted asylum to around a million Ukrainians fleeing Russia's 2022 invasion even as Germany was struggling through an energy and economic crisis.

Since then, the German government has agreed tighter deportation rules and resumed flying convicted criminals of Afghan nationality to their home country, despite suspending deportations after the Taliban took power in 2021 due to human rights concerns.

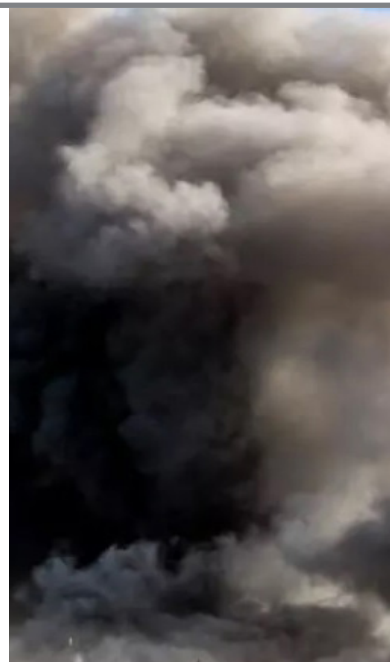
Berlin last year also announced stricter controls on its land borders with Poland, the Czech Republic and Switzerland. Those and controls on the border with Austria had allowed it to return 30,000 migrants since October 2023, it said on Monday.

Faeser said a new model would enable the government to turn back many more - but it could not talk about the model before confidential negotiations with the conservatives.

The controls could test European unity if they lead to German authorities requesting other countries to take back substantial numbers of asylum seekers and migrants.

Under EU rules countries in the Schengen area, which encompasses all of the bloc bar Cyprus and Ireland, are only allowed to introduce border checks as a last resort to avert threats to internal security or public policy.

40 Dead, Dozens Injured in Israeli Strike on Humanitarian Zone in Gaza



GAZA (Dispatches) - Gaza's civil defense agency said Tuesday that an Israeli strike on a humanitarian zone in the south of the Palestinian territory killed 40 people and wounded 60 others, with the Israeli army saying it had targeted a Hamas command centre in the area.

The strike hit Al-Mawasi -- in Gaza's main southern city of Khan Yunis -- which was designated a safe zone by the Israeli military early in the war, with tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians seeking refuge there.

However, Israel's military has occasionally carried out operations in and around the area, including a strike in July that it said killed Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif, and which Gaza health authorities said killed more than 90

people.

Gaza civil defence official Mohammed Al-Mughair told AFP early Tuesday that "40 martyrs and 60 injured were recovered and transferred" to nearby hospitals following the overnight strike.

"Our crews are still working to recover 15 missing people as a result of targeting the tents of the displaced in Mawasi, Khan Yunis," Mughair added.

In a separate statement, civil defence spokesman Mahmoud Basal said that people sheltering in the camp had not been warned of the strike, adding a shortage of tools and equipment was hindering rescue operations.

"More than 20 to 40 tents were completely damaged," he said, adding the strike left behind "three deep craters".

"There are entire families who disappeared under the sand in the Mawasi Khan Yunis massacre."

The Israeli military said in a statement early Tuesday that its aircraft had "struck significant Hamas terrorists who were operating within a command and control center embedded inside the Humanitarian Area in Khan Yunis".

"The terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip continue to systematically abuse civilian and humanitarian infrastructure, including the designated Humanitarian Area, to carry out terrorist activity against the State of Israel and IDF troops," it added.

Hamas said in a statement on Tuesday that claims its fighters were present at the scene of the strike were "a blatant lie".

Over the course of the war, Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas of using civilians as human shields, an accusation the group denies.

Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel that sparked the war in Gaza resulted in the deaths of 1,205 people, mostly civilians, including some hostages killed in captivity, official Israeli figures show.

Militants seized 251 hostages during the attack, 97 of whom are still held in Gaza, including 33 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive in the Gaza Strip has so far killed at least 40,988 people, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

The UN human rights office says most of the dead are women and children. The vast majority of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced at least once during nearly a year of war, according to the United Nations.

From 1,200 inhabitants per square kilometre before the war, the Al-Mawasi humanitarian zone now houses "between 30,000 and 34,000 people per square kilometre", and its protected area shrank from 50 square kilometres to 41, the UN has calculated.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have been mediating in efforts to forge a ceasefire and hostage-prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas, but talks remain stalled.

Hamas is demanding a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza as part of any deal, but Israel insists troops must remain along the Gaza-Egypt border.



France, Italy Cruise to Win in Nations League

PARIS (Dispatches) - France breathed a sigh of relief with their 2-0 win against Belgium after a loss last week. Meanwhile Italy are on a winning streak with a victory over Israel. Italy kept up their perfect start to the UEFA Nations League on Monday, while France got the better of Belgium and Erling Haaland struck a late winner for Norway against Austria. The Italians built on an impressive win away in France at the weekend as they beat Israel 2-1 in a game played on neutral territory in Budapest due to the security situation in the Middle East. Goals in each half from Davide Frattesi and Moise Kean were enough for Italy to win in a subdued atmosphere at the Bozsik Arena, home of Honved. Luciano Spalletti's team have reacted well to their disastrous European Championship title defence, which ended at the last-16 stage, and deserved their second win in a matter of days. Frattesi followed his goal in the 3-1 win in France by chesting home Federico Dimarco's pinpoint cross in the 38th minute to open the scoring. Fiorentina striker Kean made it 2-0 just after the hour mark with his first Italy goal in almost exactly three years, before Mohamed Abu Fani pulled one back at the end for Israel. Italy are top of Nations League Group A2 with the maximum six points, while France and Belgium are level on three points apiece. France beat Belgium 2-0 in Lyon, with Randal Kolo Muani and Ousmane Dembele getting the goals as the home side won despite captain Kylian Mbappe being left out of the starting line-up. The game was a repeat of the Euro 2024 last-16 tie which France won 1-0 in Duesseldorf thanks to a late own goal. This time, Les Bleus went ahead just before the half-hour mark, Kolo Muani applying the finish after

Dembele's mishit shot was pushed out by Belgian goalkeeper Koen Casteels. A Belgian side captained by Kevin De Bruyne could not find an equaliser and France scored again on 57 minutes thanks to a fine individual effort by Dembele. The Paris Saint-Germain winger skipped inside from the right wing before blasting a shot into the net on his left foot. In Group B3, Norway beat Austria 2-1 in Oslo as Manchester City star Haaland fired in the winner 10 minutes from time. Felix Myhre gave Norway an early lead only for Marcel Sabitzer of Borussia Dortmund to equalise for Austria before the break. However, Haaland -- who drew a blank in Norway's 0-0 draw in Kazakhstan on Friday -- showed trademark strength inside the box to hold off his marker and fire in the winner, with the goal given after a long VAR check for a possible offside. In the same group, RB Leipzig's Benjamin Sesko bagged a hat-trick as Slovenia beat Kazakhstan 3-0 in Ljubljana. In Group B4, Wales followed their goalless draw against Turkey by beating Montenegro 2-1 away for their first win under new coach Craig Bellamy. They got off to a terrific start, with Kieffer Moore and Harry Wilson both scoring inside the first three minutes. Driton Camaj then pulled one back for the hosts. Turkey beat Iceland 3-1 in Izmir, a game in which Kerem Akturkoglu of Benfica hit a hat-trick. There were also wins on Monday for Romania and Kosovo respectively in League C.

Angry De Bruyne Lashes Out at errant Belgium Teammates



LYON (Dispatches) - Belgium captain Kevin De Bruyne launched an angry tirade against his teammates after his side were beaten 2-0, away to France in their Nations League clash on Monday. Not for the first time, De Bruyne was visibly frustrated during the Group A2 match and afterwards told Belgian VTM television too many things had gone wrong in the game. "I can't say here what went wrong. I already did that to the team at halftime," he said. "I cannot repeat that in the media but it has to be better in every way. If the standard we want to reach is the best, but we're no longer good enough to get to that level, then you have to give everything. If you don't even do that, it's over. "I can accept that we're not as good as in 2018," the 33-year-old De Bruyne said of the side that reached the World Cup semi-finals in Russia. "I was the first to see that, but other things are unacceptable. I'm not going to say what." But pressed in the interview he did point out one problem. "We are too many at the back. If you stay with six at the back, there is no connection. It is what it is. It is not about transition, but about people who do not perform their tasks." Coach Domenico Tedesco said he understood De Bruyne's anger. "He is our captain and has a huge winning mentality, so he can also react emotionally." Belgium made a lively start to the game but were quickly overwhelmed by a superior France side, who bounced back from last week's loss to Italy in Paris to win comfortably.

Pats Shock Bengals to Open Jerod Mayo Era

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The New England Patriots avoided mistakes and controlled the ball to pull off a 16-10 upset of the host Cincinnati Bengals on Sunday afternoon, giving Jerod Mayo a victory in his head coaching debut. Players doused Mayo with a few gallons of blue Gatorade as the final seconds ticked off the clock in the first game the Patriots (1-0) played under a coach not named Bill Belichick in over two decades. New England running back Rhamondre Stevenson rushed for 120 yards and a touchdown on 25 carries and Keion White had 2.5 sacks, leading a strong defensive effort that stunted Cincinnati's big-play offense. Joey Slye converted three field goals, including two in the second half. Joe Burrow was held to 164 yards on 21-of-29 passing for the Bengals (0-1). Ja'Marr Chase had six catches on six targets for 62 yards. Patriots quarterback Jacoby Brissett completed 15 of 24 passes for 121 yards. Brissett was moved to tears -- before and after the game -- and credited Mayo with being a master motivator. J.K. Dobbins rushed for 135 yards and a touchdown, Cameron Dicker made three field goals and Los Angeles Chargers opened the Jim Harbaugh era with a 22-10 victory over Las Vegas Raiders in a defensive tussle in Inglewood, Calif. Justin Herbert went 17-for-26 passing for 144 yards for the Chargers (1-0), throwing a 10-yard touchdown pass to Ladd McConkey with 3:40 remaining in McConkey's first career NFL game. After winning a national championship at Michigan last season, Harbaugh made his return to the NFL after going 44-19-1 in four seasons with the San Francisco 49ers (2011-14).



New Raiders starting quarterback Gardner Minshew was 25-of-33 passing for 257 yards and one touchdown. New lead running back Zamir White had 44 yards on 13 carries while rookie tight end Brock Bowers had six receptions for 58 yards for Las Vegas (0-1). Chicago Bears scored 24 unanswered points, getting second-half touchdowns on special teams and defense, to beat visiting Tennessee Titans 24-17 in Bears quarterback Caleb Williams' NFL debut. Tyrique Stevenson gave the Bears (1-0) their first lead of the game on a 43-yard pick-6 with 7:35 to play. Chicago notched its first TD with 9:07 left in the third quarter. Daniel Hardy blocked a Ryan Stonehouse punt and Jonathan Owens recovered the ball and raced 21 yards for a touchdown. Williams, the No. 1 overall pick in this year's draft, went 14-of-29 passing for 93 yards. The Titans' Will Levis was 19 of 32 for 127 yards with a touchdown and two interceptions. Tony Pollard had 16 carries for 82 yards and a score for Tennessee (0-1), and Calvin Ridley contributed

three catches for 50 yards. David Montgomery scored on a 1-yard run in overtime to give host Detroit Lions a 26-20 win over Los Angeles Rams. Montgomery ran five times for 45 yards during the game-winning drive. He finished with 91 yards on 17 carries. Detroit's Jared Goff passed for 217 yards with a touchdown and an interception. Jameson Williams caught five passes for 121 yards and a touchdown for the Lions (1-0). Matthew Stafford passed for 317 yards with a touchdown and an interception for Los Angeles (0-1). Cooper Kupp caught 14 passes for 110 yards and one touchdown. Rams wide receiver Puka Nacua didn't play in the second half due to a knee injury. Jason Sanders nailed a 52-yard field goal as time expired, giving Miami Dolphins a 20-17 victory over Jacksonville Jaguars in Miami Gardens, Fla. Miami (1-0) trailed 17-7 at the break. After the Jaguars' Travis Etienne fumbled, Tua Tagovailoa connected with Tyreek Hill for an 80-yard score, pulling the Dolphins within 17-14 in the third quarter. Sanders later missed a 42-yard field goal but redeemed himself by making good on a 37-yarder with 4:22 left in the game. Tagovailoa finished with 338 yards and one touchdown on 23-of-37 passing. Hill -- who before the game was detained by police about a block from the stadium over a traffic violation and was cited for a moving violation -- had seven catches for 130 yards. Trevor Lawrence completed 12 of 21 passes for 162 yards and a touchdown for the Jaguars (0-1), who were outgained 400-267.

Djokovic Shut Out as Young Guns Usher in New Grand Slam Era



BENGALURU (Dispatches) - An epoch-shifting Grand Slam season dominated by Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz has provided the clearest sign yet that the "Big Three" era of men's tennis is finally over, with Novak Djokovic destined to be its last year-end number one. The golden rule that you should never write off Djokovic still holds true, but after he, Rafa Nadal and Roger Federer had won at least one Grand Slam title between them every season since 2003, this year there were none. Sinner lifted the U.S. Open title on Sunday following his breakthrough Australian Open triumph in January, while Alcaraz won the French Open and Wimbledon to mark the first time since 1993 that men aged 23 or under had swept the Grand Slams. "It's a bit different, for sure. It's something new, but also nice to see," said Sinner, who overcame the distraction of a doping controversy to help usher in a new age. "It's nice to see new champions. Nice to see new rivalries. I feel it's good for the sport to have some new champions." The extraordinary dominance of the "Big Three" saw them win 66 of 81 Grand Slam tournaments from Federer's first Wimbledon title in 2003 to Djokovic's 24th major title at Flushing Meadows last year. With Federer retired and Nadal hampered by injury, Djokovic single-handedly held back the younger generation in 2023 by winning three of the four majors and finishing as the year-end number one for a record-extending eighth time. This year, Djokovic endured a lacklustre Grand Slam campaign by his lofty standards, starting with a semi-final loss to Sinner at Melbourne Park and continuing with an injury enforced withdrawal from the quarter-finals at Roland Garros. Mauled by Alcaraz in the Wimbledon final, he suffered a chastening defeat by Alexei Popyrin in the third round of the U.S. Open and was shut out of the majors for the first time since his injury-plagued 2017 season. He did, however, produce a miraculous effort to stave off much younger rivals at the Paris Olympics, including Alcaraz in the final, and claim the gold medal he had long coveted.

Another AFCON Blow for Ghana, Diaz Rescues Morocco

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - A dismal start to 2025 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying by star-studded Ghana continued on Monday when they conceded a late goal to only draw 1-1 with lowly Niger. Defenders scored both goals in the Group F clash in Moroccan city Berkane with Alidu Seidu putting Ghana ahead on 44 minutes and Oumar Sako equalising after 81 minutes. In Group B, top-ranked African team Morocco needed 93 minutes to break down stubborn minnows Lesotho in Agadir with Real Madrid midfielder Brahim Diaz netting for a 1-0 win. Ceding home advantage because they lack an international-standard stadium, Lesotho had been written off as no-hopers against opponents 135 places higher in the world rankings. Niger were another nation unable to enjoy home advantage, moving their matchday two fixture to Morocco because they do not have a suitable venue. But the Nigeriens shrugged off the handicap to snatch a point when Sako slammed the ball into the net after a goalmouth scramble following a corner. Ghana, reeling from a shock 1-0 home loss to Angola last week in their opening qualifier, had gone ahead when Seidu scored with a deflected shot from the edge of the area. The failure of four-time African champions Ghana to win



either qualifier is baffling given their formidable line-up. Five of the team that began against Niger -- Tariq Lamptey, Thomas Partey, Abdul Fatawu, Mohammed Kudus and Antoine Semenyo -- play in the Premier League. A sixth starter against Angola from the Premier League, Jordan Ayew, was dropped by coach Otto Addo with Inaki Williams from La Liga outfit Athletic Bilbao taking his place. Nine starters against Niger operate in England, Spain or France, leaving goalkeeper Lawrence Ati-Zigi and midfielder Majeed Ashimeru as the only two not with a top-five European league club. Morocco, automatic AFCON qualifiers as 2025 hosts but playing to gain competitive match practice, kept many stars on the bench until early in the second half.

Sensing a shock outcome, coach Walid Regragui introduced four substitutes on 56 minutes, including Diaz, Youssef en-Nesyri and Hakim Ziyech. The trio combined to win the match with a Ziyech cross chested back by En-Nesyri to Diaz, who beat Lesotho captain and goalkeeper Sekhoane Moerane with a low shot into the corner. Former champions Senegal made a disappointing debut last week, conceding an added-time goal to be held 1-1 at home by Burkina Faso. Like Ghana, they were desperate for maximum points from their second outing, and achieved that goal by edging brave Burundi 1-0 through a 71st-minute penalty converted by Ismaila Sarr. The spot kick was hotly disputed after a wild attempted clearance led to two-time African Footballer of the Year and Senegalese talisman Sadio Mane being injured. Mane wanted to take the penalty after being treated, but the Egyptian referee insisted he leave the field temporarily, and recent Crystal Palace signing Sarr inherited the spot-kick duty. Burundi hosted the Group L match in Malawi capital Lilongwe because no stadium in the tiny, landlocked central African country meets international standards.